



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOME SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF THE THEOLOGY OF BUDDHISM

KENNETH SAUNDERS

Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California

It is as difficult to generalize about Buddhism as it is about Christianity. Both are very complex, and both are in transition from a medieval, conservative, and dogmatic to a modern, liberal, and scientific expression. Comparison between these two great Faiths, both claiming to be universal, is therefore extremely precarious and, indeed, is only possible in any detailed sense to the very ignorant or the very learned. The latter tend to be much less clear-cut than the former, and I am not sure that the only true statement of the case is not this: It is impossible to make any generalization about either religion to which there does not immediately appear a striking contradiction; to compare the two is almost impossible.

We may select as a fundamental difference this: that the Christian religion, springing in the first instance from Jewish soil, was monotheistic and emphasized most the transcendence of God, while Buddhism, springing up on Indian soil, had a pantheistic tendency, emphasizing his immanence. Yet the moment we have said this it becomes evident that almost immediately into Christianity there came the Logos doctrine, and that before long there came into Buddhism monotheistic tendencies in the worship of the historic and other Buddhas. So much has this been the case that Dr. Anesaki can say, "If we call the Buddhist faith in Buddha's person the Christianity in Buddhism, we may with the same right see in the Christian doctrine of the Logos the Buddhism in Christianity." It is fairer and more scientific to do neither! Probably the Buddhist and the Christian theologian could agree that, different

as were the circumstances and the environment of the two religions, they very soon, in answer to human needs and to a widening environment, began to emphasize doctrines not originally articulate in them. And the amazing thing is that Buddhism, beginning so differently, had, by the time Christianity came into the world, developed a theology which is closer to the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine of the Christian church than that of the Unitarians. The first formal expression of this doctrine is found in *The Awakening of Faith* by Aśvaghoṣa, of the first century A.D. Starting with the historic Gautama, who taught the doctrines of the orderliness of the universe, and of moral living as the way to happiness in it, the Buddhist world very soon conceived of these things in terms of a theism, as, indeed (in spite of Buddhist scholasticism), it seems more than likely that Gautama intended it should. Men came to look upon him as the embodiment of his teaching, or *Dhamma*, as the *Bodhi*, or truth, which he had discovered, just as the Christian church came to look upon Jesus not as one who showed the way but as himself the Way and the Truth. This Buddhology we can trace in its earliest development within the Pāli books of the orthodox. From being a man, supernormal but not supernatural, Gautama becomes a god among gods, and even in the *Logia* of Buddhism known as the *Iti-Vuttaka* he is made to speak the proud words, "I have mounted the empty throne of Brahmā." But just as it was necessary to relate the historic Jesus to the Eternal Order, so the Buddhist theologians sought to relate this master-teacher, whose magnetic personality has laid a mighty spell upon the Orient for 2,500 years, to the Absolute and Eternal. This Absolute they termed *dharma-kāya*, or "the body of truth," and in the historic Buddha or Buddhas they found a *nirmāṇa-kāya*, or "adapted body," in whom the Absolute revealed himself by a process of self-emptying. And as the historic Jesus was conceived, having embodied the Godhead by a process of self-emptying, to return to glory as the risen Christ,

so the Buddhist world conceived of a *sambhoga-kāya*, or glorified "body of bliss," in which, after a sacrificial life, the Blessed One was reinstated in glory. Here, as it seems to me, is at once a unique foundation for Christian teaching in Buddhist lands and an amazing vindication of Christian theology. It is surely remarkable that the two halves of the human race working independently should have solved the problem of the great Teacher in almost identical terms.

From this theological conception the two religions have, moreover, developed a mysticism and a ritual strikingly similar; union with the Eternal through unity with the historic manifestation is the essence both of the Christian and of the Buddhist life. And if the Christian has much to contribute to the Buddhist world by insisting that the divine transcendence must not be forgotten in the divine immanence, the Buddhist has much to contribute to the Christian world by his insistence upon the unity of all life, and by the linking of the universe with the individual in his meditation. This is perhaps the central ethical note of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the underlying motive of Buddhist art—that all life is one, and that all beings suffer and rejoice together. To give a very familiar example, we may cite the great pictures of the glorified Buddha on the Vulture Peak, with animals and heavenly beings, as well as men, listening in rapture to his gospel of the One Way of salvation for all; and even earlier than this in the great sculptures of Gandhāra we find the animals mourning at his funeral pyre and rejoicing with him beneath the Bo tree. The whole practice, too, of contemplation in beautiful and lonely places has wrought into the Buddhist consciousness a sympathy with nature in all her changing moods which is a rare thing in our Western lands and even in our choicer spirits is of recent growth. There is a fascinating field of study, for example, in the poetic sentences or mottoes painted upon Chinese and Japanese Buddhist temples which breathe this spirit. One I remember in the hills above Peking:

"The old gray temple needs no lamp but the moon; it needs no lock but the mists that hem it in." The influence of this meditative school upon Chinese and Japanese civilization has been incalculable, and today may be traced even in the orderliness and charm of Japanese homes and the quiet dignity of Japanese hosts.

When we turn to the devotional expression of these underlying ideas, as we find them for instance in the hymnology of the Buddhists, we shall find many a parallel to the evangelical fervor of Christian saints. Hōnen, for example, the Japanese contemporary of St. Francis of Assisi, was never tired of expressing his devotion to Amida, looked upon as the *dharma-kāya* or eternal being, whom he had seen in vision as he gazed from his quiet hermitage on Mt. Hiei at the setting sun, and of the wideness of his mercy:

His beams of love the universe pervade,
His grace forsakes not one who calls for aid.

As I have talked with Buddhist monks I have been often reminded of Wordsworth and his "Ode on Tintern Abbey," with its sense of a Presence, "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns." This idea of the divine light as present everywhere is a very familiar one in Buddhist devotion.

The haze of morning veils the light of day,
Or grudging filters some faint golden ray:
But lo! behind the shrouding veil of mist
The whole world by the sun himself is kissed.

And another image which reminds us no less of Christian teaching is that of the impartial rain which waters all alike. It is, however, in Shinran, the Buddhist Wesley, that we find the finest expression of this devotion; for Shinran developed Hōnen's teaching that man is saved by some merit and much grace, and taught a radical doctrine of salvation by grace alone, and of gratitude for this salvation as the one and only motive for the moral life. In one hymn this doctrine is exquisitely summed up:

Eternal Father, on whose breast
 We sinful children seek our rest!
 Thy mind in us is perfected
 When on all men thy love we shed.¹

Other phrases used in these hymns, such as "gladdening light," "eternal life," and "boundless love," may be all traced back to such early Buddhist books as the *Lotus of the Good Law* (*Saddharma-pundarika*), a book written about the same time as the Fourth Gospel and like it in its theology. I have many times given this Gospel to Buddhist monks and always found that they were entirely friendly to its teachings. "Why, this is just what we believe," more than one has said to me, and others have said to my friend Mrs. Gordon, who attracts to herself priests of every school in Japan by her sympathy and understanding.

The Johannine writings are indeed more and more destined to be the presentation of Christian truth to the entire Orient, and the more they are studied by Eastern thinkers the more clearly will it be seen that Christianity is not essentially the legalistic and Hebraic religion which it has too often appeared to be.

Now if the East does us this great service of re-emphasizing the Logos doctrine, which only our theologians at present make use of, this will be in itself an ample justification of the entire missionary enterprise, and it is a fascinating theme to speculate upon an Oriental Christianity into which the rich contributions of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese devotion, artistic, mystical, and philosophical, have been poured. There are signs that such a Christianity is being produced, but at present the chief result of missionary activity is that the whole Orient has come to a profound respect for the social gospel and for the teachings of Jesus about the Kingdom of

¹ A volume of these hymns will soon be translated by my friend, the Rev. S. Yamabe of the Shinshu Sect.

God. Here Christianity has an obvious and immense contribution to make to the Buddhist world. For Buddhism, in spite of the valiant attempts of an Asoka or a Shotoku to secularize it and to found an empire upon it, has been an essentially monastic religion. It too often regards the world as hopelessly out of gear, and has produced a spirit of calm resignation with compassion at the heart of it, but with a reasoned conviction that the best thing to do with the world is to leave it. Across this comes the challenge of Jesus with his doctrine of loving human service and of a Kingdom of God to be set up here and now.

Yet, different as its *Weltanschauung* is from that of Christianity, Buddhism has related its ethic in a very striking way with a kingdom, not of this world, yet slowly transforming it by the contagion of good will. Its founder is a spiritual *Cakravarti*, or emperor; refusing material conceptions of his high calling, he sets up the standard of enlightened love over against that of force and ignorance, establishes a democratic brotherhood in which old terms are redefined, insists that right living must be founded upon right thinking, and gives to those who cannot leave the world sane and practical rules for conduct in it. "The world needs most of all," he seems to say, "reservoirs of moral living of an austere but not ascetic type and fountains of good will; specialists must specialize; but it needs also ordinary folk who, when they have been infected with the spirit of compassion, will also specialize for the benefit of all." Meantime they too can die to self and as good sons, good fathers, good citizens can attain to happiness. That is the essence of the matter.

Here then, in practice as in theology, the two great religions are in substantial agreement. And today they agree also in this, that they find themselves in a world so amazingly different from that which saw their birth that its challenge will tax them to the limit. Can they meet it? That is the most important question of the day. Can they establish peace in

the earth? Can they build a bridge between capital and labor? Can they face the insistent questions of the intellect and satisfy the longings of the heart?

These are vital questions and concern the entire world; they are being answered now. And the answer would be more reassuring if their followers would get together in the sane, tolerant, and loving spirit of their Masters. Only so can the spirit of love and truth pass freely between them. Many Buddhists are ready to say with Dr. Anesaki, "We see Christ because we have seen Buddha." Cannot Christians reply, "Let us unite in the great tasks laid upon us, and learn from both"?

Lastly, as it seems to me, we who call ourselves by the great name of Christ will be wise as well as fair if we approach our Buddhist friends in a spirit of real humility. As we face the facts of our Western exploitation of Asia, and of the ultimatum offered to our civilization by our failure alike to Christianize the social order and to establish peace, it is only in a spirit of deep penitence and shame that we can offer our religion to the more spiritual peoples of the Orient. We shall say to them:

Brothers, we believe that in Jesus we have a manifestation of God more arresting and majestic with a Gospel at once simpler and more profound, and with a motive more constraining than is to be found even in the superb religion which has made your Asia great. He is our one asset; but he is a great asset! And in no spirit of superiority, but with a keen sense of our failure to give him his rightful place, we ask your help. We and he need your spiritual genius, that the world may be enriched. And because you have done great things with the religion of Gotama we believe that you have a wonderful contribution to make to the religion of Jesus. Help us to set up his Kingdom of Peace and Love, of Faith and Hope for whose coming the world is hungry.

I have often used such words as these in speaking to my Buddhist friends, and have never failed to meet with a courteous and even affectionate response. They are attuned to such an offer of a great joint-venture of faith. Are *we* big enough to make it?